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C O N F I D E N T I A L BAGHDAD 002398

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/FO MICHAEL CORBIN, NEA/I, AND NEA/IR

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/02/2019

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)

SUBJECT: MEK/ASHRAF UPDATE: GOI WILLING TO NEGOTIATE WITH
MEK AFTER RAMADAN AS LAST RESORT

REF: BAGHDAD 2341 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Gary A. Grappo for Reasons
1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: During a September 2 meeting with MNFI and Emboffs, Ali Yassery, Chairman of the GOI's "MEK/Ashraf" Committee stated: (1) the GOI will meet with the MEK after Ramadan to solicit their cooperation for the relocation; (2) the 36 MEK detainees in Iraqi police custody face secondary charges of illegal residency in Iraq; (3) family members of two recently-deceased MEK members have accused the MEK of the killings; and (4) the GOI is open to third-party mediation (i.e., UNAMI/ICRC) in GOI-MEK discussions. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (C) During a September 2 meeting with BG David Quantock (CG TF-134) and Emboffs (Iran Watcher and Acting Legal Adviser), Ali Yassery, the head of the GOI's Ashraf/MEK Committee, complained that dialogue with the MEK had proven fruitless given the MEK's hostility to the GOI. The USG delegation briefed Yassery on their August 28 discussions with the MEK (Baghdad 2341) and underscored the importance of direct dialogue between the GOI and MEK for securing a peaceful relocation from Ashraf.

¶3. (C) Yassery was initially reluctant to re-open lines of communication with the MEK, stating that the MEK's hostility and disrespect for the GOI offer little incentive for dialogue. Responding to the USG delegation's request, however, Yassery relented and agreed to travel to Ashraf to meet the MEK leadership after Ramadan (Yassery's preference) to explain the GOI's relocation plan in order to secure MEK buy-in and cooperation. The GOI remains committed to moving them after Ramadan, Yassery asserted, but would attempt to reason with the MEK and offer incentives, including temporary legal status, but only after the MEK agree to relocate. He added that the landowners whose property was confiscated by Saddam's government to build Ashraf are demanding the return of their property, further complicating the situation.

¶4. (C) Yassery invited USG mediation between the GOI and MEK to convince the latter to cooperate. The USG delegation explained that several efforts to do so, most recently on August 28, had failed. The USG maintained an interest in ensuring the GOI honored its assurances to treat the MEK humanely and in accordance with Iraqi and international law, but we did not intend to intervene between the two sides. The USG delegation again strongly urged the GOI to engage in dialogue with the MEK and proposed the parties engage a third-party, such as an international organization (i.e., UN, ICRC), to monitor developments, including the relocation. Yassery welcomed the third-party suggestion as a possible alternative.

¶5. (C) Regarding the 36 MEK detainees in Iraqi custody, Yassery noted that a judge had ordered them released on bail

pending the results of the investigation. However, a judicial panel subsequently overturned the initial decision, citing concerns about the legality of the initial ruling and the nature of the ongoing investigation. He added that the detainees also face charges of residing in Iraq illegally, a crime that, according to Yassery, carries a 5-7 year prison sentence upon conviction. (NOTE: The detainees continue their hunger strike, but are apparently on a liquid diet. END NOTE.)

Comment

16. (C) Yassery's willingness to meet with the MEK is a positive step, but one that may be short-lived given the MEK's stated intentions to resist any GOI relocation plan. Our efforts to reason with the MEK have not moved the MEK to engage in direct and fruitful dialogue with the GOI. Rather, our meetings with the MEK appear only to have perpetuated MEK perceptions of USG accountability for their welfare. Post will meet with UNAMI, in anticipation of their visit to Ashraf this week, to gauge the UN's interest in taking on a role in resolving the GOI-MEK impasse.
HILL